

To: All Local Leagues in California  
From: League of Women Voters of Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville  
About: State Program Planning for 2015-17  
What: A Study Proposal on Raising and Maintaining a Livable Minimum Wage  
for consideration at each League's Program Planning Meeting  
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**The League of Women Voters of Berkeley, Albany and Emeryville urges you to recommend a State Study on "Raising and Maintaining a Livable Minimum Wage" at your State Program Planning Meeting.**

This study should include consideration of: the current cost of living, current state and local living wage legislation and rates, whether and how to include a cost of living escalator so the wage will keep up with the actual cost of living; and whether and how to adjust eligibility levels for medicare/medi-cal, food stamps and other benefits available to low income wage earners, so that a raise in the minimum wage does not automatically trigger loss of benefits unless and until the level of the minimum wage is actually adequate to cover those expenses without supplemental benefits.

Raising the minimum wage has been a political issue locally, in many states and nationally, but LWVUS and LWVC have no position on the Minimum Wage or Living Wage. The LWVUS Social Policy Position on Meeting Basic Human Needs, quoted in summary below, seems to imply that it should support lobbying for raising the minimum wage to a level adequate to live on, in other words, to a "living wage."

**Meeting Basic Human Needs**

Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

**Income Assistance.** Support income assistance programs, based on need, that provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing and shelter.

**Support Services.** Provide essential support services.

**Housing Supply.** Support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.

Unfortunately, the 1988 National Update of Meeting Basic Human Needs asked whether members supported a minimum wage, but Leagues around the country did not reach consensus. Therefore, LWVUS refuses permission to Leagues to lobby to raise local or state minimum wages. LWVBAE found this out when we asked LWVUS for permission to use this position to lobby to raise the minimum wage in Berkeley.

Then we searched for existing League positions that we might be able to propose as a national League position by concurrence. The only appropriate one we found was LWVKansas's Living Wage position. LWVBAE proposed a Concurrence with the LWVKansas Position on a Living Wage at the 2014 National Convention. A majority of the delegates voted yes, but a 2/3 vote is required for a national League position to be adopted by Concurrence.

LWVUS recommends that the quickest and easiest way to get a national position on raising the minimum wage to a livable or living wage would be that a State League

1. Adopt a study of Raising the Minimum Wage or Guaranteeing a Living Wage at their 2015 Convention,
2. Adopt the position at their 2017 Convention and
3. Propose a Concurrence with that state position at the LWVUS 2018 Convention.

Note: There are several problems with the LWVKansas Position. In particular, the inclusion of the words Kansas and LWVKansas. A new Position should be worded to avoid such specificity.

## **Arguments in Favor of a Study on Raising the Minimum Wage:**

The study should be easy to do. There is sufficient resource material available in the literature, press and from experts throughout California. Many communities in California already have minimum wage laws. There is data available for these localities about the local minimum and average wages and the cost of living, that is, what it costs to live decently. There are many studies and debates about the economic, political, social, health and educational impacts of inadequate and adequate incomes.

To take one example, experts find that recent efforts to reform our educational system, such as expanding Early Childhood Education and the new Common Core Standards, cannot sufficiently raise the achievement of poor children. They argue that we must also fight poverty to ensure that all America's parents earn enough to feed and house their children and have the time to support their education. Many students at the bottom of the achievement scale have parents who earn below the minimum wage and often work more than one full job.

For the past two decades, California has had a higher poverty rate than the rest of the country. In 2011, California's poverty rate rose to 16.9%. More than six million Californians were living in households with incomes below the federal poverty level (about \$23,000 for a family of four). The majority of poor people in California live in families where at least one member is working full or part-time.

Yet, in most surveys, [around two-thirds](#) of respondents or more say they back a proposal to raise the minimum wage. That support typically includes a healthy amount of Republican voters, along with an overwhelming majority of Democrats. The proposal put forth by congressional Democrats, which would raise the federal wage floor to \$10.10 per hour and tie it to an inflation index, enjoys [widespread support](#) in most polls. The federal minimum wage hasn't been raised since 2009, when the last of a series of increases that had been passed in 2007 took effect.

**Therefore, we urge you to join us in recommending that LWVC adopt a State Study on Raising and Maintaining a Livable Minimum Wage as the Priority Program for 2015-17.**

### **Resources:**

**Dr. Arindrajit Dube**, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts, lists minimum wage research first among his areas of study. Recent post on twitter include:

- [The Poverty of Minimum Wage "Facts"](#)
- Separating signal from noise: a review of 12 major studies on minimum wages and poverty
- The Minimum Wage We Can Do
- Minimum Wages and Job Growth: a Statistical Artifact

**Robert Reich**, Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley has a website, [Robert Reich.org](#) with articles about minimum wage. There are more articles in the San Francisco Chronicle and probably other California papers on the subject, for example: A October 3, 2014, OpEd piece entitled;

- Raising the wages of the lowest paid is what boosts the economy

**Senator Elizabeth Warren** Asks Why Employers Aren't Paying \$22 in Minimum Wage Costs: Elisabeth Warren Published on Mar 18, 2013 with response by economist Dr. Dube at a Senate hearing, video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwAQwltEjUo>